

# NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

*Protecting Parks for Future Generations*

**Testimony of Sally Jewell  
CEO, Recreational Equipment Incorporated  
Board of Trustees, National Parks Conservation Association**

**Re: "National Parks in the Pacific Northwest"**

**before the  
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources  
of the House Government Reform Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Bellevue, Washington**

**September 12, 2005**

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, it is with great honor and pleasure that I appear before you today to discuss the future of our national parks. I want to thank you for holding this important hearing and for your interest and support of our nation's crown jewels -- our national parks.

My name is Sally Jewell and I am Chief Executive Officer of Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI). REI is the nation's largest consumer cooperative with more than 2.5 million active members. It is the leading national retailer and online merchant of outdoor gear and clothing for camping, hiking, climbing, bicycling, canoeing, kayaking and winter sports. I am here today in my capacity as a member of the National Parks Conservation Association Board of Trustees, on which I have served for the past year. Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its 300,000 members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

In addition to being an avid supporter and visitor to the national parks, I am a founding board member and past president for the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, a local organization, dedicated to enhancing the long-term environmental health and economic vitality of the I-90 corridor from Puget Sound to the Cascade Mountains. I serve on the University of Washington Board of Regents and have been a member of the Washington State Governor's Competitiveness Council. Prior to joining REI, I worked for nearly 20 years in the banking industry, serving as head of business activities in the Northwest for Rainier Bank, Security Pacific, and WestOne Bank; as president and CEO of WestOne Bank Washington; and as president and CEO of Washington Mutual's Commercial Banking Group.



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My passion for the national parks stems from a lifetime of experience in and around the parks. Here in the Pacific Northwest, we are blessed to have some of the nation's most spectacular national parks including Olympic, Mount Rainier, and North Cascades. As a young child, my first hiking experiences were along the Carbon River in Mount Rainier National Park. The incredible old growth trees of Olympic continue to move me and bring as they bring back childhood memories of the Hoh Rainforest and my first backcountry adventure with a group of fellow 12-year-olds making a weeklong trek.

The national parks across the western United States, from Yellowstone to the Grand Canyon, were destinations for my family and I as we explored the wonders of this country as fresh immigrants from England. Integral to my experience in the parks with my family were the guided ranger tours and talks that we were fortunate to enjoy. I came to deeply appreciate and respect our national park rangers, who were knowledgeable and patient in satisfying my childhood curiosity.

The national parks have come even closer to home this year as my son joined the volunteer corps of the climbing rangers at Mount Rainier National Park, interacting on a daily basis with thousands of visitors who come to see this amazing place, many attempting to achieve the climb of a lifetime. I myself have made that climb on a number of occasions, each a unique and enriching experience.

Unfortunately many families today don't have these same experiences because lack of funding in our national parks has significantly reduced the number of ranger programs and rangers themselves. This point was central to NPCA's *Endangered Rangers* report issued last year, and was effectively raised by Representative Dicks during debate over the fiscal year 2005 Interior Appropriations bill. I am very concerned that my grandchildren will not have the same opportunities to learn from the rangers as I did growing up.

Each part of the world has its unique attributes that make it special. Here in the United States, our national parks play no small role in making this country a very special place for residents and visitors alike. Our national parks preserve our most treasure natural and cultural assets for this and future generations to experience and enjoy. Rangers and staff of the Park Service inspire a love of nature, a respect for culture, and a reminder of the sacrifices our forbearers made in shaping this country. The parks serve as a bridge to introduce our history and culture to the things we value highly as a nation. As an adult and a parent, I have visited national parks from coast to coast, always making time to meet park rangers and attend programs when available. The funding challenges facing the parks have become increasingly evident in many of the parks I visit. Yet, these parks continue to have a magic that I only hope will continue indefinitely. As a nation, we must show a strong commitment to our national parks and provide the parks the funding they need to thrive. Doing anything less is unacceptable.

### ***National Parks of the Pacific Northwest***

The national parks preserve the most superlative examples of America's natural, cultural and historic resources. The fourteen national park sites in Washington and Oregon protect some

of our nation's most treasured natural and historic resources, from the snowcapped peak of Mount Rainier to the historic spot at Fort Clatsop where Lewis and Clark first viewed the Pacific Ocean 200 years ago.

For example, the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, created in November 2004 by incorporating state parks in Washington and Oregon along with Fort Clatsop National Memorial Park, preserves the historic lands and provides interpretation for Lewis and Clark's epic journey. The park includes the winter encampment of Lewis and Clark, which will celebrate its bicentennial this November.

Crater Lake National Park, located on the northern end of the Klamath Basin in Oregon, lies within the caldera of Mt. Mazuma. This volcano of the Cascade Range erupted more than 7,000 years ago, creating the deepest lake in the United States. The park extends from the depth of Crater Lake at 1,932 feet to the peak of Mt. Scott at 8,929 feet, with 90 percent of the park managed as wilderness. Crater Lake has long been of particular cultural significance to native peoples, particularly the Klamath and Modoc Indians. Portions of this park were originally included in the lands allocated to the Klamath Tribes in their 1864 treaty with the United States government.

North Cascades National Park, a wilderness park with high jagged peaks, glaciers, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, and lush forests, contains tremendously diverse flora, fauna, and animal species. In addition to its unprecedented natural amenities, the park is also rich in history. The area was home to the Native Americans and a trade gateway between the Plateau tribes to the east and the Coast Salish to the west for over 8,000 years.

These examples are but a few of the tremendous natural, cultural, and historic resources managed by the National Park Service in the Pacific Northwest. Unfortunately, the Park Service just does not have the resources needed to adequately protect these priceless parks.

### ***Funding Challenge***

There is no question that one of the most pervasive challenges facing America's parks is chronic under funding. This is not a Republican or Democratic problem; it is an American problem, one that has grown over decades of inadequate funding under administrations and congresses of both parties.

Business plans developed in over 70 national parks across the nation show that on average, parks operate with only two-thirds of the needed funding—a system-wide deficit in excess of \$600 million annually. Annual operating budgets of the national parks have just not kept up with the need. Compounding this problem in recent years has been the increased security demands place on the parks in the years following 9-11. Additionally, individual park sites have been forced to absorb a number of unbudgeted costs, including cost-of-living adjustments, storm damage, and other fixed costs. With oil prices soaring today, the utility and vehicle costs associated with managing the 388 national parks covering 83.6 million acres will only further exacerbate the financial crunch placed on our parks.

*Pacific Northwest Base Operating Budget at a Glance*

When reviewing the base operating budgets of the national park sites in Oregon and Washington, you find a similar trend to the budgets of parks across the country -- the base operating budgets of these parks is just not keeping pace with needs. As you can see in the chart (Appendix 1), only two of the 14 park sites in the Pacific Northwest are slated for base increases above the rate of inflation in the upcoming fiscal year 2006 budget. Parks in Washington and Oregon on average are slated to receive an increase of only 2.6 percent to their base operating budget in the upcoming 2006 fiscal year, with Olympic and Mount Rainier receiving an increase of 2.7 percent and 2.6 percent respectively. When factoring in a 3.1 percent rate of inflation, it is no wonder the parks are not able to keep up with the needs.

Thankfully Chairman Souder, you, and the other members of Congress gathered here today, have raised the issue of the importance of increasing park operations funding with your colleagues in the House, and the final fiscal year 2006 Interior Appropriations Act provided an increase of approximately \$10 million above the administration's request for park operations. However, once Park Service assessments are factored in, and an across-the-board reduction to the final bill is applied, that increase does very little to address the needs of the parks.

One bright spot to note when looking at the Park Service budget is the increase provided to the parks base-operating budget in the current 2005 fiscal year. Parks in the Pacific Northwest received an average increase of 7.7 percent this year. While this annual increase was helpful, and due in large part to the efforts of the members of Congress gathered here today, particularly Representative Dicks and his tireless work in the Appropriations committee, it must be sustained and built upon for years to come.

To truly address the park's annual operating shortfall requires a sustained effort of significant annual funding increases and effective park management of these resources to enable the parks to thrive. Absent this, the Park Service is unable to properly protect the priceless resources contained within their boundaries and provide the services to the millions of visitors that they expect to receive when experiencing our national crown jewels.

It is also clear that annual appropriations alone cannot alone fix the problem facing the national parks. This problem is larger and demands public/private partnerships, something REI is actively involved in. But we also need some creative thinking in Congress and must look for innovative ways to provide the parks the funding they need. One such approach is the National Park Centennial Act that you, Representative Baird, and Representative Reichert, have all sponsored, to address this problem. NPCA strongly supports the Centennial Act. As you know, this legislation has garnered strong support across both sides of the aisle and I encourage you to continue to work with you colleagues on Capitol Hill to move this legislation forward in support of the parks.

Two premier national parks in the Pacific Northwest region, Mount Rainer and Olympic, provide striking examples of the consequences of the funding shortfalls to the national parks in the region.

***Mount Rainier National Park***

Mount Rainier National Park encompasses over 200,000 acres, including the greatest single-peak glacial system in the United States. The park contains Mount Rainier (14,410 foot summit) an active volcano encased in over 35 miles of snow and ice, as well as dense old growth forests and sub alpine flowered meadows. The park is also rich in cultural resources and was designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1997. The park provides outstanding recreational opportunities. Climbers from around the world come to hike and summit Mount Rainier every year.

Yet, funding shortfalls have had a significant adverse impact at Mount Rainier. While the park surrounds an active volcano, it has no full-time volcanologist on hand. Park officials estimate the backlog of deferred maintenance costs for historic buildings, trails, and bridges exceeds \$100 million. Faced with budget shortfalls last summer, Rainier's rangers were forced to curtail visitor center hours and cancel educational programs.

A Strategic Organizational Review (SOR) conducted by Mount Rainier National Park key staff in 2004 found that flat budgets, higher operating costs, and increased workloads were taxing the workforce of the park. According to the Mount Rainier SOR, "Mount Rainier National Park has struggled with the same stressing factors facing all national parks: Erosion of base funding through higher operating costs, no diminishment of operational and project workloads, competing internal and external priorities and expectations, and a pending competitive sourcing study. In constant dollars, the park's FY04 budget of \$9.29 million has been flat-lined since the last base increase in 1997. In reality during this period that park has lost an estimated \$1.79 million in annual funding capability through unfunded pay increases, increased benefit costs association with the transition of FERS-based workforce, assessments, CPI and other cost increases."

Based on these trends, the park projected an additional 15 percent loss in base funding over the next five years. An internal hiring freeze was in place and 16 permanent positions were left vacant.

This review at Mount Rainier provides a stark picture of the fiscal reality facing our parks. I appreciate that Representative Reichert celebrated National Trails Day this past May volunteering at Mount Rainier, expressing his support for addressing the funding shortfall and maintenance backlog crippling the park. He has seen first-hand the effects of the financial pressure facing Mount Rainier.

***Olympic National Park***

The mission of Olympic National Park is to preserve, protect, and interpret, for the benefit of the American people, the Olympic Mountain and Pacific Coast wilderness, containing the finest remaining examples of temperate rain forest, seacoast, active glaciers, herds of Roosevelt elk, and those cultural resources that trace human presence in Olympic National Park from prehistory through to modern times. The park protects nearly one million acres of mountains, forests, and coast, including approximately 65 miles of Pacific coastline – one of the

largest stretches of protected wilderness coast in the contiguous United States, as well as one of few temperate rainforests in the world. Olympic National Park has traditional ties to more American Indian groups than most other national park units.

According to a comprehensive resource assessment conducted by NPCA's *Center for State of the Parks*, Olympic's overall stewardship capacity – the Park Service's ability to protect resources at Olympic National Park – rated a poor score of 59 out of a possible score of 100. Funding and staffing shortfalls constrain resource protection efforts and all park operations.

The health of Olympic National Park is chronically threatened by an annual shortfall in excess of \$6 million. This shortfall impacted the experiences of visitors this past summer and limited the Park Service's ability to care for Olympic's wildlife, cultural artifacts, and buildings. The number of seasonal rangers was reduced from 130 in 2001 to only 25 in 2004. Two years ago, funding shortfalls threatened to close the visitor center in Forks.

In order to address the funding shortfalls, the park has cut back on permanent staffing levels through retirement and attrition, with 28 positions currently vacant; reduced the number of seasonal staff; and started to charge more operational costs to what were traditionally project, donation, recreation and franchise fees. As a result, preventative maintenance at Olympic goes undone.

In 10 years, the seasonal labor force so critical to search and rescue, visitor service, research, maintenance and performing other operational functions through the busy visitor season has gone from a base funded operation in 1994 to one almost entirely funded by project monies or fees. Since the certainty of these funds from year to year is fluid, it makes it difficult to plan for summer operations in advance, when the parks face the highest visitation. These basic operational needs funded by project monies creates not only great uncertainty in the park, but also more time spent by park staff competing for these funds internally within the Park Service to cover these basic services that are reoccurring annually.

Concerned with what they were seeing on the ground at our national parks, NPCA collected over 5,000 personalized comments from park visitors at national parks across the Pacific Northwest this past summer on why they care about the parks. These visitors were very engaged in national park issues, expressing their appreciation and adoration of the parks. They expressed concern about the future of the parks, specifically the funding challenges facing the parks in the northwest and across the nation. For example, from David of Kirkland, Washington: "Along with the wilderness areas, the national parks are all we have left. Future generations will judge our efforts in whether we stood around or preserved these areas." From Greg of Winlock, Washington: "National parks are an appreciated part of the American experience. Interpretive programs should continue to be a high priority. It is not just a warm and fuzzy experience; these are traditions and gifts passed on to our children." From Jonathon of Vancouver, Washington: "The national parks provide historical information. They also promote tourism, which helps stimulate the local economies." And from Joseph W. and Margaret M. Miller from Bellevue, Washington: "We worked from the late 1950's to 1968 for the establishment of the North Cascades National Park. Upon our retirement in 1970, we worked as unpaid volunteers – biological researchers for the National Park Service. We feel that the current lack of funding is

undoing much of this work.” It is clear from these comments that the public understands well both the value of the national parks and the challenges they face.

### ***REI Partnership with the Park Service***

Just as increased public funding is critical to the health of the national parks, private dollars through partnerships also play a critical role in the support of our nation’s parks. To this end, REI is pleased to participate in a number of partnerships with the Park Service, working hand in hand with the agency to provide needed support. Here are a few examples.

Last Year, REI donated \$100,000 to support the National Parks Volunteerism and Enhancement Program” through the National Park Foundation. This program was designed to assist parks in their efforts to provide high quality volunteer experiences that strengthen the enduring connection between volunteers and their national parks. The program reviewed and ranked 113 proposals and funded the top 22 projects in 16 states and the District of Columbia. Through our partnership, we directed much needed dollars to volunteer programs across the nation, at parks including Valley Forge National Historical Park (PA), Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens (DC), Voyageurs National Park (MN), Golden Gate National Recreation Area (CA), and here in Washington at Mount Rainier and North Cascades.

Over the last few years, REI has also supported the National Parks Foundation through the sales of the National Parks Pass in our stores, and through co-promotions that have raised awareness of the parks. One promotion we supported in our stores had all employees wearing a specially produced T-shirt with a ranger image on the front to draw attention to the importance of national parks. In a subsequent year, we produced high-tech t-shirts that had graphics and messages unique to outdoor recreation destinations, including Yosemite National Park, Rocky Mountains National Park, and Mt. Rainier National Park. REI made a donation upon the sale of each shirt to volunteer programs dedicated to each respective park location.

REI is also proud to participate in the Japan Volunteer in Parks Program. This past summer marked the 12<sup>th</sup> summer in a row that the program sent Japanese college students to Mount Rainier National Park to assist with repair and rehabilitation projects.

In addition to coordinating and hosting volunteer projects in parks across the country, this year REI will donate \$2.5 million, focused primarily on caring for outdoor areas for recreation, promoting safe and responsible recreating, and connecting young people with the outdoors – this ranges from school courses taught by REI staff in “Leave no Trace” principles, to providing gear to scouts and many other youth groups that organize outdoor outings in the national parks and other public lands.

The public places a high value on our national parks. While REI and other private organizations and philanthropies are more than willing to partner with the Park Service, it must be clear that philanthropy’s role should be to provide the margin of excellence, not the margin of survival. The private sector and philanthropy expects to see a return on its investment. For when the private sector sees itself supplanting, rather than supplementing funding for our parks,

they will retreat. If we are to be successful, we must work cooperatively to protect and enhance our national parks for this and future generations.

***Economic Benefits of the National Parks in the Pacific Northwest***

National parks play a critical role in both the identity and economy of the Pacific Northwest. Having spent nearly 20 years in the finance industry, I understand and appreciate full well the important economic benefits our national parks play in the tourism, recreation, and related industries in the Pacific Northwest.

According to the National Park Service, the national parks generate about \$11 billion in economic impacts each year. The parks generate over 226,000 tourism related jobs in local economies, not to mention their additional positive economic impact on communities. Here in the Pacific Northwest, each year more than 8 million tourists visit the national parks. In 2003, these visitors spent over \$250 million in the parks and gateway communities, created over 6,700 jobs, and generated over \$100 million in income for our communities.

I have included a chart (Appendix 2) showing the economic impacts of the national parks in Washington and Oregon. As you can see, the national parks in the Pacific Northwest have a tremendous economic impact in the region, generating approximately \$122 million in personal income. Olympic National Park alone generated nearly \$40 million in personal income in and around the park.

The City of Forks, represented here today by Rod Fleck, provides an excellent example of the economic benefits our national parks. In April of this year, the City of Forks City Council adopted a resolution in support of adequate funding for the Park Service, citing the important role Olympic National Park plays in the tourism sector of the local, county, and regional economy.

The City of Forks, the Port Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and other local communities, representing all five counties around Olympic National Park and more than 1,400 tourism-related businesses, joined with NPCA to host a national park workshop for business leaders on the Olympic Peninsula last spring. More than two-dozen lodge owners, tour operators, chambers of commerce, and business owners and local community members expressed their concern for Olympic National Park, and the importance of a healthy park for their respective businesses. In their eyes, customers will not return to businesses outside the park if the park itself is in bad shape. These businesses rely upon a healthy Olympic National Park.

As the representatives of more than 1,400 area businesses, three of these community leaders traveled to Washington, DC to meet with their members of Congress to share their stories of closed visitor centers, cancelled ranger talks, and express their strong concern over the current status of our national parks.



*Conclusion*

Residents of the Pacific Northwest appreciate and value the great outdoors. The national parks of the Pacific Northwest protect, preserve, and interpret some of our nation's most treasured natural and cultural resources, as well as provide us with unparalleled recreational and educational opportunities. The parks are a key component to the make-up of the region, providing recreation, relaxation, and economic benefit to the thousands of residents of this community.

Our national parks are special places and deserve our steadfast support. Partnerships are an important component to providing for the parks, and REI will continue to play an active role in this partnership. But partnerships alone cannot solve the problem facing the parks. Government must also do its part. As stewards of these irreplaceable places, we cannot continue to neglect them.

Again, I thank you for holding this important hearing and giving me the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer questions.

# NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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## Appendix 1

### Base Operating Budget of National Park Units in Oregon and Washington NPS FY 2004 – FY 2006 (all dollar amounts in thousands)

Unit	FY 04 Enacted	FY 05 Estimate	Increase FY 04 to FY 05	% Increase	FY 06 Request	Increase FY 05 to FY 06	% increase	% Gap Between Inflation and Funding Request for FY 06*	Change In Real Dollars From FY 05 Estimate to FY 06 Request**
Crater Lake NP (OR)	4,010	4,214	204	4.8	4,321	107	2.5	-0.61	-27
Ebbey's Landing NHR (WA)	209	285	76	26.7	288	3	1	-2.11	-6
Fort Vancouver NHS (WA)	1,032	1,442	410	28.4	1,472	30	2	-1.11	-16
John Day Fossil Beds NM (OR)	1,278	1,314	36	2.7	1,348	34	2.5	-0.61	-8
Klondike Gold Rush-Seattle Unit NHP (WA)	421	434	13	3	447	13	2.9	-0.21	-1
Lake Roosevelt NRA (WA)	3,967	4,091	124	3	4,203	112	2.7	-0.41	-19
Lewis and Clark NHP (ex-Fort Clatsop NM) (OR and WA)	1,182	1,216	34	2.8	1,248	32	2.6	-0.51	-7
North Cascades NPS Complex (WA)	5,911	6,055	144	2.4	6,230	175	2.8	-0.31	-19
Mount Rainier NP (WA)	9,290	9,869	579	5.9	10,134	265	2.6	-0.51	-50
Olympic NP (WA)	10,128	10,711	583	5.4	11,003	292	2.7	-0.41	-50
Oregon Caves NM (OR)	1,156	1,199	43	3.6	1,231	32	2.6	-0.51	-6
San Juan NHP (WA)	2,533	2,758	225	8.2	2,853	95	3.3	0.2	6
Whitman Mission NHS (WA)	680	701	21	3	726	25	3.4	0.3	2
				7.7			2.6		

\*Based on 3.11% rate of inflation.

\*\*The FY 06 request provided an increase of \$50.5 million to National Park System operations. The final FY 06 Conference provided an increase of \$60.5 million.



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Appendix 2

**Washing and Oregon  
Economic Impacts of National Park System\***

Unit	Recreation Visits	Total Visitor Spending	Average Spending Per Party Day	Total Jobs	Personal Income Generated
Crater Lake NP (OR)	479,183	\$33,180,000	\$121	931	\$12,370,000
Fort Vancouver NHS (WA)	510,383	\$12,480,000	\$89	558	\$9,760,000
John Day Fossil Beds NM (OR)	108,181	\$3,340,000	\$62	88	\$1,220,000
Klondike Gold Rush-Seattle Unit NHP (WA)	64,097	\$3,670,000	\$115	87	\$1,780,000
Lake Roosevelt NRA (WA)	1,356,331	\$35,900,000	\$55	913	\$12,780,000
Lewis and Clark NHP (ex-Fort Clatsop NM) (OR and WA)	255,853	\$7,890,000	\$62	207	\$2,880,000
North Cascades NPS Complex (WA)					
Ross Lake NRA	346,542	\$1,250,000	\$54	226	\$3,160,000
Lake Chelan NRA	35,549	\$1,250,000	\$63	32	\$440,000
North Cascades NP	20,724	\$1,130,000	\$78	22	\$380,000
Mount Rainier NP (WA)	1,262,351	\$29,620,000	\$66	781	\$13,040,000
Olympic NP (WA)	3,225,327	\$89,500,000	\$86	2,356	\$39,240,000
Oregon Caves NM (OR)	94,745	\$4,500,000	\$93	113	\$1,970,000
San Juan NHP (WA)	1,198,105	\$52,780,000	\$89	1,310	\$22,920,000
Whitman Mission NHS (WA)	56,009	\$1,730,000	\$62	46	\$630,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9,013,380</b>	<b>\$278,220,000</b>	<b>\$78</b>	<b>7,670</b>	<b>\$122,570,000</b>

\* Economic impacts were estimated using the Money Generation Model (MGM2) 2003.



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